# COMIC WORLD

JULY 1995 ISSUE 41

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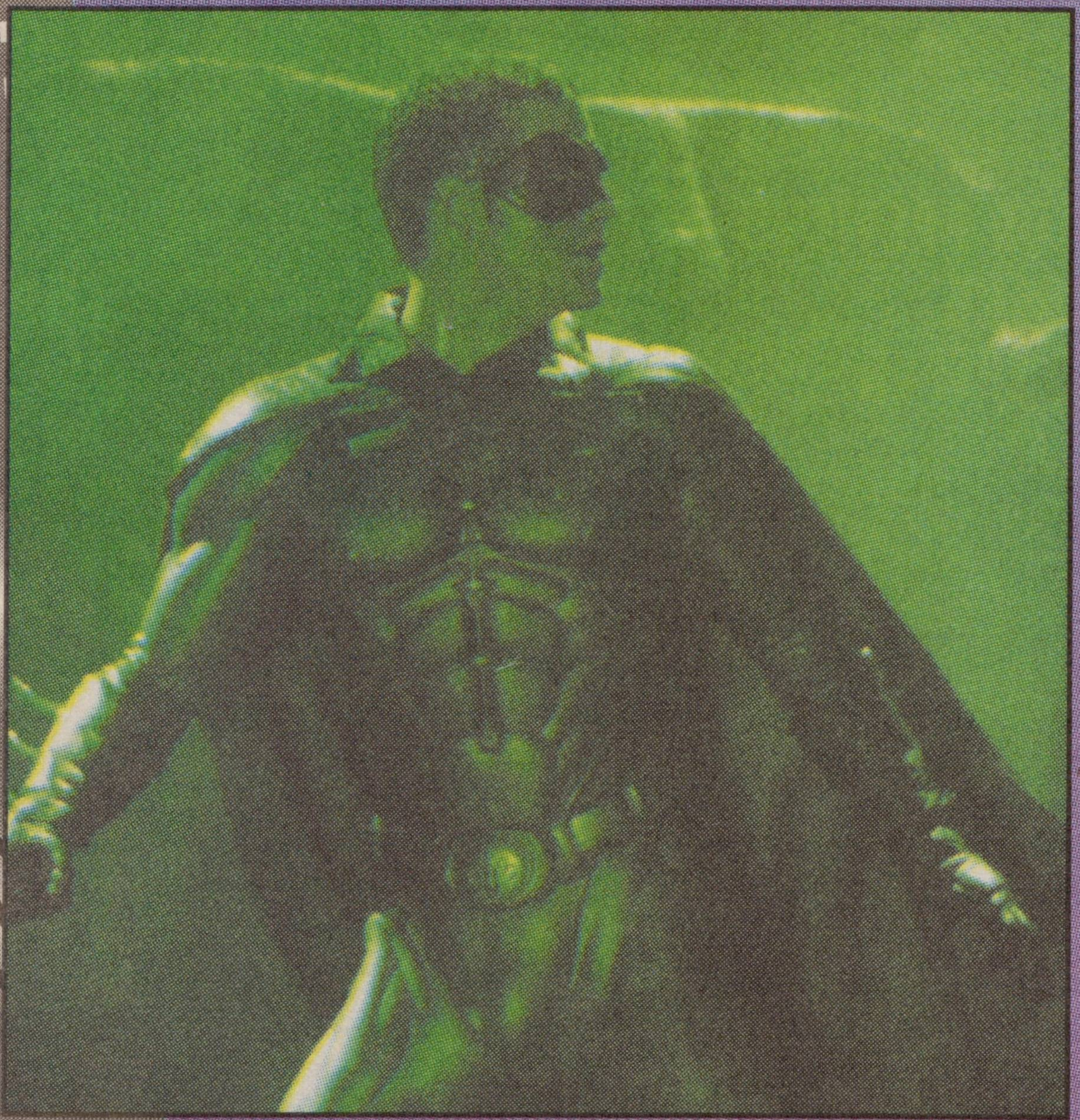
# The Show go

PETE TAYLOR EXPLORES THE NEW WORLD OF BATMAN

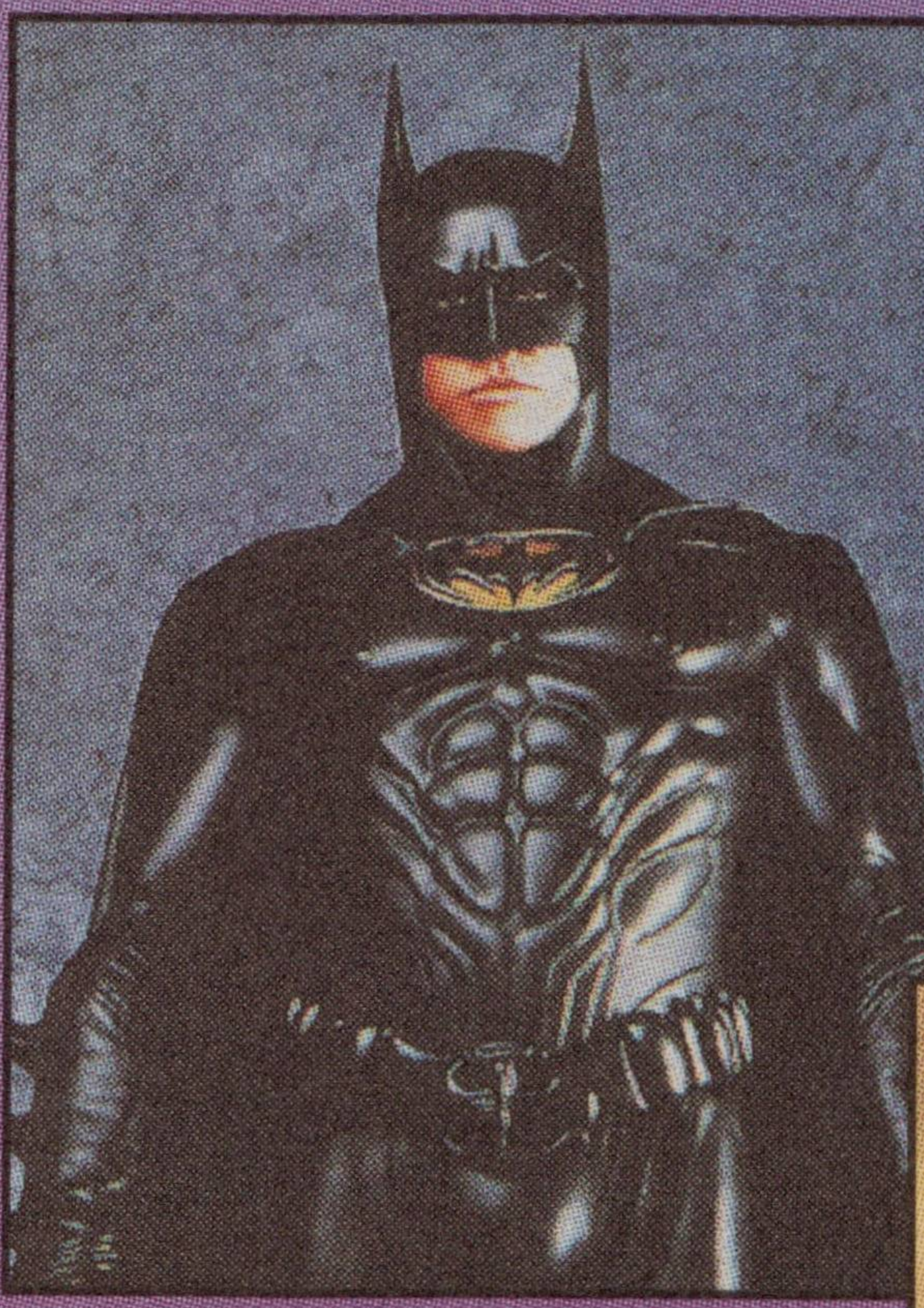


The title is a little hopeful. Nothing lasts forever - except a diamond or sapphire bracelet, as Anita Loos once said. In Hollywood no-one is bullet-proof: you're only as good as your last film.

The Batman franchise ran into some serious problems with Batman Returns. It was the highest-grossing movie of the year admittedly, but many of the films supporters - the financial supporters, the ones who pay the studio large amounts of money to place that Batsymbol on their burger boxes - felt the film had slipped away from the audience they wanted it to target. Parents were worried about the sequel's omniscient darkness and barely controlled sexuality. Fans were in two minds about the idea of pushing Batman into the background. Let's face it: the Batman image of the avenging Dark Knight is one of the most powerful in comics, and having his role dwarfed by two super-villains annoyed the purists. On the other hand, the Bruce Wayne/Batman duality was pretty much a two-dimensional part which had had over fifty years to develop in comics, but only two hours of reconstruction in the first movie. The villains were so much more colourful and interesting and made better screen fodder.

Solving the problem was the task of new director Joel Schumacher, best known for St Elmo's Fire and The Lost Boys before rising to A-rank via Falling Down and The Client. His task was to lighten up the whole production considerably and rebuild Batman from the ground up, and that meant an almost wholly new cast [Holy New Cast? You'll have to try harder than that, Taylor - Ed]...and with Gotham City as much a member of the show as anyone, that too needed a facelift. The much publicised departure of Michael Keaton has actually allowed Schumacher to sweep clean Tim Burton's two (albeit incredible) movies and start afresh. Val Kilmer came on board as Batman and, at thirty-six (eight years younger than Keaton) brings to the role a younger man's vitality. It also meant changes to the casting of his love interest, Rene Russo stepping aside for twenty-seven-year-old Nicole Kidman to star as psychotherapist Dr. Chase Meridian who loves Bruce, but fantasises about The Batman.

The villains here are crazy rather than scary, with Carrey in particular a visual comedian who has proved his calibre with three major successes last year. As The Riddler he beat out Robin Williams, who'd dithered over taking the part for too long, and in truth Carrey makes a better job of the question mark tipped cane-twirling Edward Nygma, using his fluid, expressive features to chart The Riddler's descent throughout the film from brainy computer nerd Nygma into the rich, over-styled, off the edge Riddler.



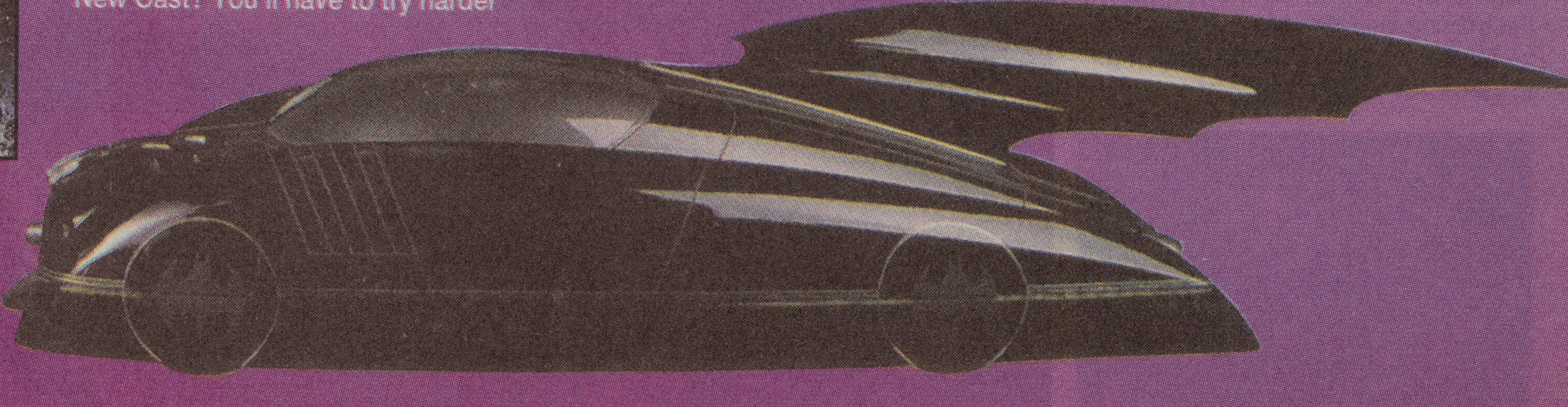
Tommy Lee Jones is a rather more straightforward transfer from the comic, his badly scarred half-side heightened by totally schizophrenic clothing which is a fashion war locked in battle: demure one side, gaudy the other. It's the sort of OTT part that the veteran actor has suddenly become associated with and a far call from his debut in Love Story twenty-five years ago. Two-Face has two loves in tow, one for each of his personalities: known as Sugar and Spice (although originally to be called Leather and Lace) and played by Drew Barrymore and Debi Mazar respectively, Barrymore all frills and lace, Mazar a demoness in a spiked choker and fetish-wear.

One of the most coveted roles was that of Robin which eventually fell to the young Chris O'Donnell, star of The Scent of a Woman and The Three Musketeers. The part is a blank slate if you ignore the Dick Grayson of the TV series - even the comicbook Robin has been played by various side-kicks over the years.

Still, it was not a completely all-new cast, links with the two Tim Burton movies, retaining its links via repeat performances by Michael Gough (Alfred) and Pat Hingle (Commissioner James Gordon).

### BACK TO THE BATCAVE

With the Batman Forever set locked tighter than a duck's nether regions, the press took to rumbling as soon as the cameras started rolling. Carrey's freestyling clashed with Kilmer's method acting...not so says Schumacher, soothing the press like Tiger Balm. The Batman costume has been 'humanised' - more realistic musculature and has had nipples added, much to the displeasure of Batman's creator



# es on forever...

Bob Kane. True, admits Schumacher, but the idea was to mimic more accurately Kilmer's body, the suit almost a second skin which allows him far more flexibility than the previous Batsuit. With a lack of anything else to write about, the nipples caused a shockwave in the US press...as if it really matters! The Batmobile and Batcave have both been given a major overhauling, the Batmobile now looking like something out of H.R. Giger's original Alien paintings, the Batcave a huge set created at the Dome - the one-time home of Howard Hughes' giant folly, the Spruce Goose.

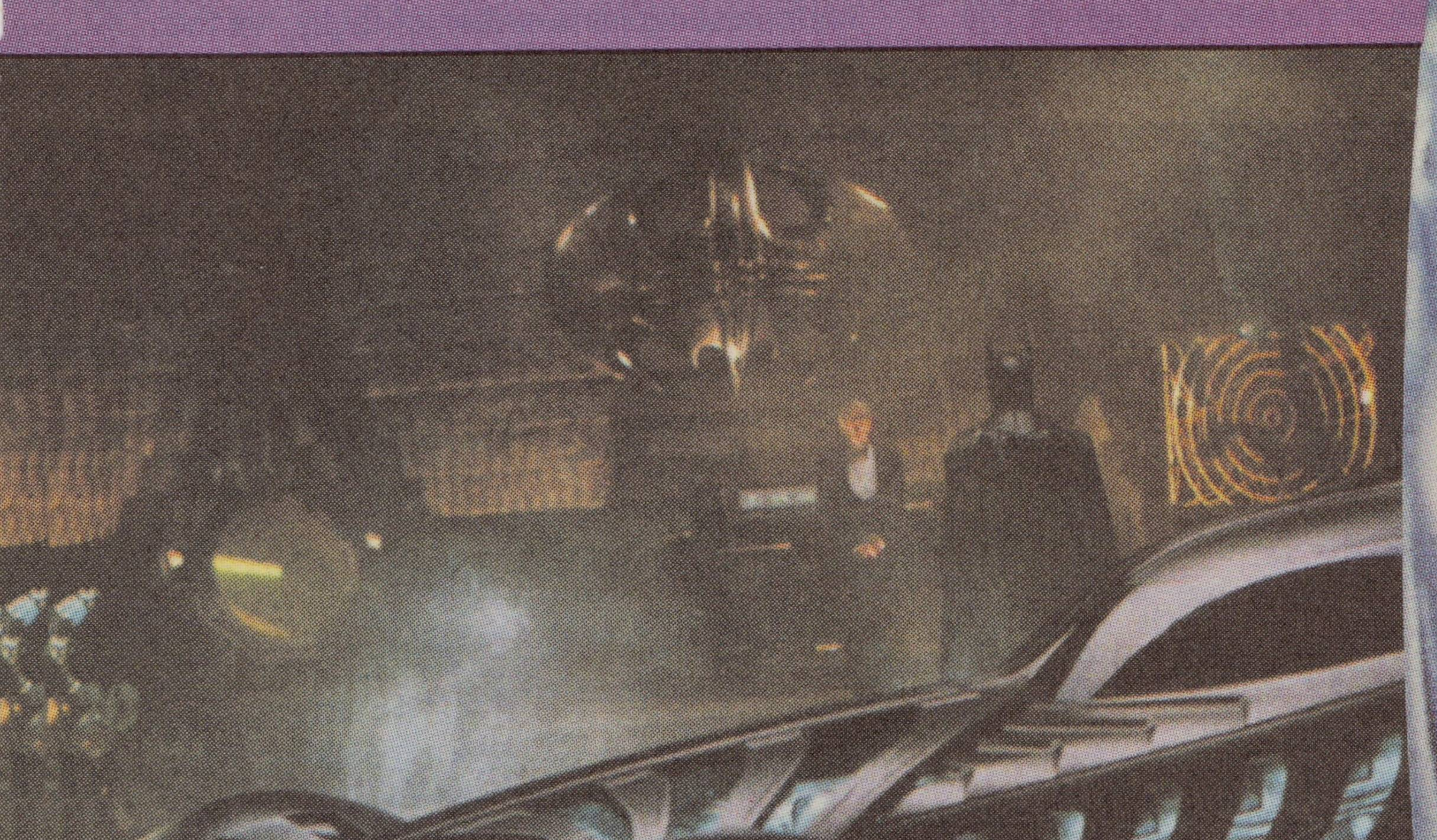
The new movie began filming back on September 21 1994 in New York, some of whose streets inspired the rising starscrapers of Gotham City designed by Barbara Ling, before moving to Los Angeles to complete 107 days of shooting, although Schumacher and others had been on board long before that: the screenplay by Lee & Janet Batchler, who had previously written The Equalizer amongst other TV shows, was accepted and polished up by Akiva Goldsman who had worked with Schumacher on The Client.

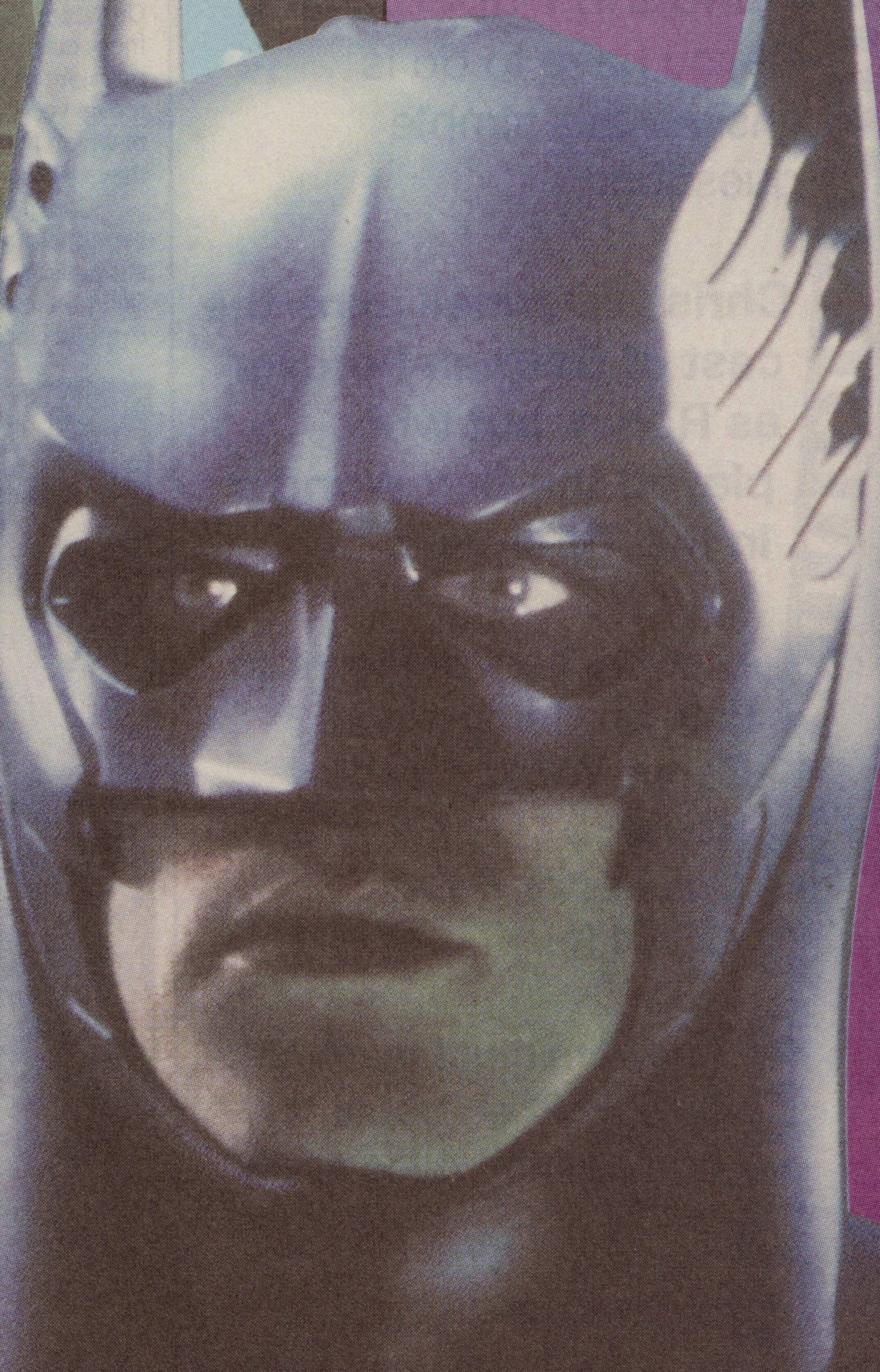
Batman Forever is very much a three-ring circus: the 'origin' of Robin is told in the early minutes of the film as mental-home escapee Harvey Dent crashes a circus performance in search of Batman whom he blames for his disfigurement and in the melee Dick Grayson's high-flying trapeze-artist family are killed. Edward Nygma begins life as as a nerdish employee of Wayne Enterprises who creates a machine that can suck out people's minds; the project is presented to Bruce Wayne, with whom Nygma is infatuated, who turns it down and as admiration turns to disillusion so Nygma begins his transformation into The Riddler.

The third string to the movie's bow is Bruce Wayne's increasing worry about his own state of mind, and he thus finds himself on the couch of psychologist, Chase Meridian.

Chris O'Donnell's introduction spreads the action over two heroes - although the techno-suited Robin still has the sensible reaction to his introduction to the Batmobile and takes it for a spin...well, wouldn't you?

CW





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